

THOUGHT AND ACTION

IT is a common occurrence, in these days of spreading anxiety, for someone to break in on the order of what seems a pedestrian inquiry with the fervent demand that "we" begin to *do* something about obvious emergencies. "We," for example, should establish an international authority that will really *prevent* the outbreak of war; or "we" should find a way to direct the development and limit the use of scientific discoveries. Why should "we," who can in a few moments list major instances of both public and private default, any longer tolerate this uncontrolled overflow from an apparently bottomless Pandora's box of technological ingenuities?

Such comments have both a rational and irrational ground. They are provoked by an overwhelming sense of need, and defy criticism with stress on a moral "ought" which is loosely applied to everybody. The demand for action is supported by an endless supply of illustrations of what happens when explosive and environment-transforming innovations invade our lives without prediction and with no concern for their effects beyond the *ad hoc* anticipations of a narrow self-interest.

So of course "we" should do something about all this.

But who is this "we"? Clearly, as an identity that can be expected to respond to such appeals, it is not there at all. Some kind of "we" undoubtedly exists as a great, passive collective of human beings to whose hopes, needs, and hungers allegiance may be declared, but it does not exist as an informed and coherent body of people with unified will, ready to execute the mandates of reason, needing only the spur of moralists and the plans of social engineers. The difficulty of moving vast populations to act for their own good is so great that men who actually engage in this activity

are almost never heard to express themselves concerning what people "ought" to do. Such pieties are reserved for baccalaureate sermons and the Fourth of July.

Yet no man with concern for the general good ever really abandons the idea of the moral "ought." Usually, he keeps it as a secret resource—a motive rendered publicly useless by vulgarization—and substitutes what he hopes will be more persuasive, such as obedience to the Laws of Nature, as objectively revealed by Science; or, as events grow threatening, simple survival, since there is no longer time to consider anything else. It is certain that he will develop some idea of how to deal with the tensions between what is and what he thinks ought to be, and will work at this as well as he can.

Now what, precisely, does he want to accomplish? Usually, his motives are mixed. As a practical man, opposed to injustice and folly, he wants to operate on the will of his fellows. He wants to get them to *do* something. But as a Humanist—as someone, that is, with respect for the integrity of individual decision—he wants them to understand and agree in what they do.

So he must answer this question: How long should a practical man wait, while others whom he wants to persuade are going through the laborious processes of "understanding"?

It should be useful, here, to consult Socrates. In the *Apology* Socrates explains to his countrymen why, throughout his life, he has avoided politics. This is his way of saying that he has chosen to concern himself with understanding—not with getting others to agree on a course of action, but with involving them in his search for the understanding all useful action requires.

Why, then, did Socrates get into such serious trouble with the Five Hundred?

One answer would be that whenever the necessities of understanding are seriously cultivated, a point is reached where even simple acts of inquiry become a threat to conventional opinion. Asking questions about views which are held to be the support of "morality" is an activity which can easily be made unpopular. So you could say that politics had invaded the region of Socrates' educational enterprise, and he met the invasion head-on. With the encouragement of his oracle, he refused to compromise on the necessities of understanding. This was the Socratic form of "action."

A similar explanation for his involvement in politics was given by Gandhi. Putting together portions of statements he made at different times, we have the following:

If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake. . . . The fact is, that when I saw to a certain extent my social work would be impossible without political work, I took to the latter and only to the extent that it helped the former. I must therefore confess that work of self-reform or purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called political work.

While in the life of every man there are overlapping areas of understanding and action, there remains a distinctive difference between the two. Many things in nature and life can be understood, but not altered by action—as, for example, the facts of astronomy. And there are areas in which, as understanding grows, action becomes increasingly problematic. This is easy to illustrate. Last month an authority on the common cold pointed out that a period of "non-treatment" is in many instances far more curative than specific remedies. There are learning situations in which the teacher must practice restraint instead of eager instruction. The expectation of correcting all social disturbance by the passage of laws, or solving all economic problems by the distribution of money, is known

to be false, despite the interminable political debates on these issues.

Actual conflict between activities devoted to understanding and habitual forms of action is quite familiar in history. One example is before us today in the conflict about the modern university. The very conception of the university is up for debate. There is the idea that the university should be the "continuing critic" of its parent society. And what good is criticism if it does not lead to action in the light of what is seen to be wrong? But since there is seldom agreement on the action that ought to be taken, there is the rejoinder that the university ought not to bite the hand that feeds it—which is in some sense also the change-resisting *status quo*. Another view is that the vast and complicated development of modern technological society has exceeded any possibility of an over-all view, so that its basic assumptions can no longer be questioned, and even the term "university" should be changed to Multiversity. This means that the higher learning should accommodate itself to servicing the various functions—sophisticated forms of "action"—which have developed all around us, and which must, since our lives depend upon them, be recognized as good.

There is a sense in which the factual reality of the proliferation of technological processes and arrangements is in the multiversity view of education substituted for Galileo's Book of Nature. The Technological Society is bigger than any of us, and all we can do is to keep it going as efficiently as possible. Humanists and students disagree. The humanists write books and the students demonstrate, while serious teachers are disturbed by the fact that, no matter who is "right" in these contentions, the values of dispassionate understanding seem to be going underground.

Although the dissension concerning the role of the university might be settled easily enough on paper, in terms of abstraction, to make an ideal hierarchical scheme work out in practice is now almost impossible. It is difficult enough for the

individual to keep distinct in his own life the difference between understanding and action. When an attempt is made to *institutionalize* this distinction in mass university education, the resulting partisanship soon erases the subtle meanings and subjective balances involved.

From another point of view, it should be obvious that the schools of higher learning cannot help but reflect the larger situation in the world—in which the demands of action seem so morally urgent that any talk of "understanding" is condemned as a delaying tactic. The catch is that the results of the action we know how to take are often unexpectedly bad, and this, for people who see nothing else to do, leads to angry nihilism. It is the piling up of such sequences in action that makes serious and sensitive men seem most at home in the language of despair—we are all either victims or executioners—while for many of the young there seems no choice but that between dehumanization and a lonely if heroic isolation.

There may be a kind of consolation in the idea that the trouble we are having is partly due to the vastly increased responsibility assumed by modern man, starting in the eighteenth century. The transfer of authority to individuals, according to democratic theory, with loss, at the same time, of the social and psychological stability in hierarchical organization, was bound to produce strains in the relationships of the individual to society, simply from lack of limit and vague definition of role. Ideas about both are in disorderly flux. "Morality" is no longer only a question of how the individual ought to harmonize himself with nature and other men, but now includes the enormous—and quite unmanageable—question of how the external world should be controlled or revised. This is a world largely constructed of artificial replacements of the natural environment, in ill-fitting combination with a social system once claimed to be natural, but now regarded with unsettling doubts.

When men ask themselves what are the "constants"—the fixed rules or laws—to which they can refer in thinking about these questions, they get answers which are in agreement only about what is *wrong*. Inquiry as to what is "right" produces a clamor of competing claims. The emotionalism implicit in this situation is manifestly an enemy of attempts to understand what has happened to us all.

It might be said that it was out of his recognition of the need to close the gap between action and understanding that Gandhi evolved his theory of non-violence. Nonviolent action can be defined as an effort to affect the will of those toward whom it is directed, and at the same time to avoid the anti-human results of violent or coercive action intended to change the behavior of others regardless of their understanding of the justice in the change.

Gandhian methods insist that there be neither violence nor indignity to one's opponent, in view of the central contention that no achievement of ends which is not attended by common understanding can last. Most of all Gandhi insisted that the individual endeavoring to practice nonviolence personally act out of his own understanding, and this, he pointed out, may not lead to uniformity of behavior. As he put it:

For me the matter does not admit of reasoning beyond a point. It is one of deep conviction that war is an unmixed evil. I would not yield to anyone in my detestation of war. But conviction is one thing, correct practice another. The very thing that one war-resister may do in the interest of his mission may repel another war-resister who may do the exact opposite, and yet both may hold the same view about war. The contradiction arises because of the bewildering complexity of human nature. I can only, therefore, plead for mutual toleration even among professors of the same creed.

Here, the dependence of action on *individual* understanding is made absolutely clear, and also the priority of understanding. Not the mode but the *integrity* of the act is for Gandhi the crux. He

was himself wholly unable to follow a formula, as the following makes clear:

Life is governed by a multitude of forces. It would be smooth sailing if one could determine the course of one's actions only by one general principle whose application at a given moment was too obvious to need even a moment's reflection. But I cannot recall a single act which could be so easily determined.

Being a confirmed war-resister I have never given myself training in the use of destructive weapons in spite of opportunity to take such training. It was perhaps thus that I escape direct destruction of human life. But so long as I lived under a system of government based on force and voluntarily partook of the many facilities and privileges it created for me, I was bound to help that government to the extent of my ability when it engaged in a war, unless I non-cooperated with that Government and renounced to the utmost of my capacity the privileges it offered me.

Let me take an illustration. I am a member of an institution which holds a few acres of land whose crops are in imminent peril from monkeys. I believe in the sacredness of a life, and hence I regard it as a breach of *Ahimsa* to inflict an injury on the monkeys. But I do not hesitate to instigate an direct an attack on the monkeys in order to save the crops. I would like to avoid this evil. I can avoid it by leaving or breaking up the institution. I do not do so because I do not expect to be able to find a society where there will be no agriculture and therefore no destruction of some life. In fear and trembling, in humility and penance, I therefore participate in the injury inflicted on the monkeys, hoping some day to find a way out.

Even so did I participate in the three acts of war. I could not, it would be madness for me, to sever my connection with the society to which I belong. And on those three occasions I had no thought of non-cooperating with the British Government. My position regarding that Government is totally different today, and hence I should not voluntarily participate in its war, and I should risk imprisonment and even the gallows, if I was forced to take up arms or otherwise take part in military operations.

But that still does not solve the riddle. If there was a national Government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war, I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it. For I know that all its members do not believe in non-violence to the

extent that I do. It is not possible to make a person or a society non-violent by compulsion.

Non-violence works in a most mysterious manner. Often a man's actions defy analysis in terms of non-violence; equally often his actions may wear the appearance of violence when he is absolutely non-violent in the highest sense of the term and is subsequently found so to be. All I can then claim for my conduct is that it was, in the instances cited, actuated in the interests of non-violence.

For some, perhaps, this may produce a frowning disavowal of Gandhi's example; but the question is, what *was* his example? While he appeared inconsistent at the level of action, apparently this did not seem to him very important, except as he felt an obligation to explain himself as well as he could. He was striving for consistency in *understanding*, however disordered his actions might appear from a single point of view.

For Gandhi, the act of self-search, the inquiry into truth, was hardly different, in essence, from his hope of winning understanding from others, and the practical lubricant for uniting these two objectives in action he found in the elimination of self-interest, sometimes called sacrifice.

Another aspect of the problem of the relationship between understanding and action is clarified by recalling Leslie Farber's idea of the two realms of the will. In *The Ways of the Will* (Basic Books), Dr. Farber shows that all men are subject to the "recurring temptation" to substitute action for understanding, which means imitating the "public face" of understanding without grasping its meaning. A man, Dr. Farber points out, can will to perform acts of self-assertion and bravado, but he cannot will courage; he can will commiseration but not sympathy; and he can will to have knowledge but not wisdom.

The first or higher realm of the will is the stance of integrity, honesty, and inward consistency. Gandhi would call it the realm of truth, of the spirit of non-violence, and a great deal of his educational effort was devoted to distinguishing between the quality of action

flowing from this realm of understanding and acts which are only imitations of such behavior. The closing of the gap between the two realms of the will is essentially a problem of individual character and personal moral health; but it is also a problem which takes on plainly objective dimensions in movements involving large numbers of people. Hence the planning and "discipline" Gandhi demanded in all instances of mass non-violent action.

One might say that Gandhi saw little value in any demonstration or act which was not shaped, in its origins, by the first realm of the will. He would have agreed with Dr. Farber that only distortion can result from misapplication of utilitarian volition. The sources of conflict can never be changed by manipulation or coercion. Again and again, he called off non-violent demonstrations because he felt that the maturity of the higher realm of the will was lacking in the demonstrators, and that no good could result. Meanwhile, underlying all Gandhi's undertakings was his advocacy of "constructive work," by which he meant the deliberate engagement in the whole-making and character-forming disciplines of community life, through which inner freedom and understanding are slowly generated.

By abstraction from Gandhi's life of this profoundly inward quest for truth or understanding it is possible to arrive at a regenerated conception of the basic purpose of education and of the highest role of the university. Before there can be a "we" to whom proposals for broad human benefit can be seriously addressed, there must exist a vital and on-going dialogue concerning the relationship of every sort of human decision to these all-important questions. A self-governing and action-weighting "we," able to command the respect and sometimes the assent of the rest of society, would be a "we" endowed with reflective knowledge concerning the prevailing level of public understanding and the degree to which this understanding can participate in proposals for reform or change.

This is the basic reason for maintaining a certain "distance" between public life and great educational institutions devoted to meaning and understanding. But this distance becomes a betrayal when the idea of "understanding" is wholly divorced from its consequences in action in both individual and public choice. For then ungoverned moral emotions rush in to fill the vacuum, and the university becomes a kind of cultural citadel which is fought for by partisan forces as a strategic "higher ground." Some would make it a home base for forays of social reform; others want to restore its "distance" as a means to comfortable escape from public obligation; while still others would make it a privileged center for the practice of high intellectual technology. There can be no resolution of these contrary claims on the basis of action alone. Unfortunately, the idea of "understanding" has for so long been identified with a life separate from responsibility and action that only revolutionary reforms in the *meaning* of understanding can hope, in time, to re-establish education as a social organ fostering independent judgment in human life.

Yet the fact is that this independence has clear identity only in abstraction, and is retained only so long as it illuminates the field of action. Illumination, however, is not restriction. Thought *restricted* to action will never comprehend the high role and necessity of understanding. And action which claims supreme virtue simply from being action eventually destroys the very organs of thought.

REVIEW

PIONEER IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

TRIGANT BURROW was a psychotherapist who was born in 1875 and died in 1950. At the time of his death, he was head of the Lyfwynn Foundation, an organization devoted to understanding psycho-social ills, which continues this work. Burrow trained with Adolf Meyer and Carl G. Jung, and for some years followed the teachings of Freud. In the early 1920's he was drawn to study of what he called "the social neurosis," becoming convinced that something was missing or wrong in Freudian doctrine. His first book, *The Social Basis of Consciousness* (Harcourt, Brace, 1927), reveals the innovating courage of a man who followed where his discovery in the practice of psychotherapy led him, laying the foundation of a view that he would spend his life developing. In brief expression, Burrow maintained:

. . . what we call the individual is by no means the fresh and native expression of individuality pure and simple that we are accustomed to assume, rather . . . he is an individuation resulting from the repressive forces acting upon him from the environmental social aggregate in which he is himself but an intrinsic and contributory element. For every individual arising amid the influences of the social system is but a special application of the social system around him. Whatever the code of the consensus, the individual is necessarily an offprint of it.

This conclusion, which grew out of working with patients, and later from experiments with groups, is clear enough in its distribution throughout society of the causes of mental illness, bringing the outspoken social critique which characterizes much of Burrow's work. It happens, however, to be a theory of causation which makes it extremely difficult to account for a man like Burrow himself. Accordingly, we may say that he was redressing balances, pointing out the vast neglect in psychotherapeutic theory of the anti-human influences of conventional society rather than providing a full explanation of the shaping of individual man. Burrow's intellectual integrity was

armed by courage, enabling him to ignore the prejudices of his time. There was small chance of wide acceptance, even among his professional colleagues, of the ideas of one who could write:

When people speak of "normality," they really mean a social reaction average that is based upon a wishful, nonobjective premise. Their "normality" bears no relation to an objectively established biological norm. To cite ideological examples within the states: a communist is a person who assumes the right to infringe on the rights of other people. He demands the right to the property of others, and he will make himself very disagreeable if his idea of what is right (his right) is questioned. The capitalist is a person who exercises the right to employ adroit deals through which he also acquires for himself the largest attainable amount of other people's earnings and, like the communist, he acquires them from the largest possible number of people. Such is the capitalist's idea of what is right—*his* right. In the phylobiological reckoning, the contrast between communist and capitalist is a distinction without a difference.

Burrow's broad diagnosis is that man's capacity for symbolization and the development of symbolic forms of belief and "morality" have created artificial systems of thought and behavior which replaced "the organism's primary principle of motivation and have thus precluded a dependable basis of scientific observation and adjudication."

In Burrow's thought, the primordial wisdom of the organism is what we must get back to. His reverence for the organism suggests a nostalgic longing for the pre-intellectual and pre-moral simplicities of the Garden of Eden. This is an enormous load of potentiality for the "organism" to bear, and it must be admitted that Dr. Burrow's exposure of conventional hypocrisy and of professional authoritarianism on the part of therapists seems to spring more from a humanly experienced and compassionate heart than from his "organism."

In the posthumous book we have for review, *Preconscious Foundations of Human Experience* (Basic Books, 1964, \$5.50), edited by William E.

Galt, a foreword by Nathan W. Ackerman briefly outlines Dr. Burrow's career. Dr. Ackerman, who is chairman of the Family Institute' discovered Burrow's writings in the 1950's and found them "provocative, piercing, even shocking." They were, in Ackerman's view, "the vanguard of a new social-psychiatric approach to mental health, the core of an advancing science of human behavior." They had been set down thirty years earlier, but had been ignored and shelved. Psychiatrists knew little or nothing about Burrow. Those who remembered him "seemed to dismiss him quickly as one who had gone off the path." Dr. Ackerman asked himself: "How could this giant figure have remained so obscure, and for so many years?" After telling how Burrow's ideas and explanations were confirmed again and again in his own clinical work—and recognizing the force in Burrow's indictment of "the abnormality inherent in so-called normal behavior, the greed, the hoarding, the murderous competitiveness"—he asked the obvious question, and provided an answer:

But how was I to understand this piece of history: Burrow dismissed from his university appointment, excommunicated from the American Psychoanalytical Association, and then a virtual taboo placed on his name? Burrow, a dedicated researcher in human behavior, tossed into scientific exile! Was this some peculiar quirk, an odd accident of history? This could hardly be. I could explain it in only one way.

A generation ago, Burrow's theories were far in advance of his time. They were too radical, too threatening to conventional systems of thought. By Burrow's own admission, even he felt inwardly threatened by his discoveries concerning the pathology of normality—his ideas must have been felt to be a danger to the then-popular concepts of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Even more important, his approach challenged the established self-identity of investigator and therapist, and the implications of his theories for a revolution in established social forms were possibly such as to impel what amounted to a mass avoidance, an unconscious complicity in protest and denial. This is surely one of the strangest episodes in the history of psychiatry.

But the truth will out. Now comes a curious and paradoxical shift. One by one, Burrow's concepts

begin to re-emerge in the current literature, but oddly enough, not as coming from him. Piecemeal, they reappear and gain strength in the writings of contemporary scholars in the field of mental health.

What is in this book? Essentially it is a profoundly moving argument, developed from the grain of clinical experience and experiment, for establishing as normative in both life and therapy the primordial, pre-verbal harmony which exists between mother and child, and which ought to exist between the individual and the social group, but does not, because of "sick" doctrines of isolated individualism and a divisive selfishness that is rationalized by false "naturalism." In Burrow's thought the idea of love is freed from identification with the aggressive imperialistic tendency of the sexual impulse. Cooperation and joining together in human relations are shown to rest on "a more fundamental principle than do competitiveness, separateness, and destructive exploitation." The book is rich in citation from poets, novelists, and the data of cultural anthropology. Burrow's warm-heartedness is manifest in every section, and it plays a more important part than simply an anterior motive for scientific research; the writer's humanity is suffused throughout particularized discussion of psychoanalytical theory, including a searching examination of Freudian doctrine, and is both the solvent of error and the principle of coherence in the array of clinical data which shapes the author's account of humanist psychology.

We must trust to Dr. Ackerman's statement for extensive evidence that psychotherapeutic literature is now filled with similar themes, although in one instance the parallel is very plain—between, for example, Burrow's ideas and the recent writings of Rollo May on the distorting and dehumanizing effects of the contemporary preoccupation with sex. Burrow has this passage:

Love is unity, participation, understanding. It is simple, harmonious, unquestioning. Love is one with life itself. It is life in its subjective relation. Cognition, on the contrary, pertains to contrast, demarcation, distinction. It is close kin to pride. In other words, it is synonymous with acquisition aim,

calculation. Hence it is kin to self-interest, to desire, that is to say, to sex.

It is my thesis that the irreconcilable mental conflict represented in the incest revolt is the expression of the inherent discrepancy due to this reversal of life when the objective mental principle is turned in on the essentially primary, subjective phase of consciousness. It is the conflict embodied in the opposition between love as aspiration and life, on the one hand, and sexuality as covetousness and self, on the other. Thus, in my interpretation, incest awe is the subjective reaction resulting from an affront to an inherent psychobiological principle of unity. It is the revulsion due to the impact of an organic contradiction.

Love is without an object. It is whole spontaneous, free. Sexuality has its object, its divisive gratifications. Sexuality always clashes with love. It is self, and love is precisely the unawareness of self. As Nietzsche says, "There are moments spoken from the clear fire of love, in whose light we understand the word 'I' no longer."

In the section on "Primitive Behavior," Burrow presents fascinating evidence to show that schizophrenia may often be recognized as a failing and distorted effort of the patient to regain union with the world—an attempt to escape the antagonisms and mutilations brought by the prevailing social symbolism and its requirements of conformity. This ill, for Burrow, is a symptom of the organism's struggle to recover from the common social neurosis.

Lacking in this book is any positive and developed theory of the role of the symbolic life of human beings—a resolution, that is, of the Promethean agony which is something more than a return to pre-verbal and pre-conceptual "all-ness." This, we suspect, was not possible for Burrow, in terms of the resources of the "organism" alone, and his work as diagnostician and healer took all his time.

COMMENTARY

THE CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

THE brief discussions of art and the role of the artist in these pages need the contrast of some critical perspective concerned with present-day art, since repeated use of the artist as symbol of the high activity of growth into fuller humanness may sometimes be bewildering, and excite a skeptical response. It is certainly not easy to discern such qualities in much that is now called "art." The *London Times Literary Supplement* for March 23 has an article which contributes to an understanding of the great difficulties under which the modern artist labors—which are also taken by its writer, A. Alvarez, to be great opportunities. In one place Mr. Alvarez says:

The artist is not "alienated," he is simply lost. He lacks altogether the four traditional supports upon which every previous generation has been able, in one degree or another to rely: religion, politics, national cultural tradition, reason.

This disappearance of a familiar context has radical consequences:

Certainly, for the past forty years or more, the history of the arts could be written in terms of the continual and continually accelerating change from one style to another. The machinery of communications and publicity is now so efficient that we go through styles in the arts as quickly as we go through socks; so quickly, in fact, that there seem no longer any real styles at all. Instead there are fashions, idiosyncrasies, group mannerisms and obsessions. But all these are different from genuine style, which in the past has always been an expression of a certain fundamental coherence, an agreement about the ways random experience can be made sense of.

Today—

With no firm area of common belief or agreement, styles come and go like neon signs. . . . Yet this is not necessarily crippling or destructive. Artists usually talk of their alienation in a world without values with a sob in their throats. This seems to me as inappropriate as the tone of those protest songs about nuclear weapons, where the singer invariably manages to imply that the H-bomb has been invented solely to get at *him*. As I see it, the failure of all traditions and beliefs is not an excuse for the failure of the arts, it is their greatest challenge or irritant. It simply entails a new emphasis. The artist's need to

create a new style and language for himself and from scratch means that he is deliberately *using* his art, using it to create his own identity. Hence that sense of strain and extra æsthetic urgency in so much of the best contemporary work.

In England, Mr. Alvarez believes, there has not been sufficient response to this challenge, with too much "weary insistence on a class system and traditional pieties" which no longer seem relevant to anything:

In spite of all the cleverness and skill, the final effect is of something muffled and unreal. The reason is not that the social realities have altered but that they are no longer particularly *real*; certainly, they seem a good deal less urgent than the psychic realities. It is as though the revolution started by the abstract artists had finally been achieved; abstraction is no longer a theory, nor even a style; it is the defining condition of the arts.

But this, as Mr. Alvarez shows at some length, imposes obligations to discipline even greater than those accepted by artists of a less demanding past. The artist's resources are now in his inner world, and the temptation to present the material of this world, simply "naked," so to speak, is very great, on the theory that a careful fidelity to subjective content cannot fail. Mr. Alvarez does not agree:

. . . the obvious truth is that the more subjectively exposed the theme, the more delicate the artistic control needed to handle it. . . . the genuine artist does not simply project his own nervous system as a pattern for reality. He is what he is because his inner world is more substantial, variable and self-renewing than that of ordinary people, so that even in his deepest isolation he is left with something more sustaining than mere narcissism. In this, of course, the modern artist is like every other creative figure in history: he knows what he knows, he has his own vision steady within him, and every new work is an attempt to reveal a little more of it. What sets the contemporary artist apart from his predecessors is his lack of external standards by which to judge his reality. He has not only to launch his craft and control it, he has also to make his own compass.

In this *London Times* article, Mr. Alvarez develops such issues and questions extensively, with various illustrations, mostly from poetry, so that his generalizations acquire considerably more meaning than they can have here.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves THE GOLDEN AGE

IT is often pointed out that the terrors and cruelties of modern war have had a coarsening effect upon human beings. It is said that people now remain indifferent to daily reports of horrible occurrences, whereas, two generations ago, such reports would have excited expressions of outrage and protest. It would be easy to draw up a bill of particulars along these lines, and many writers have done so.

On the other hand, there are activities in which very different tendencies can be seen. Take for example attitudes toward children. The past twenty years or so has seen an enormous multiplication of groups and organizations devoted to children's needs. This is an area divorced from politics, and one where the effects of social dislocation and group egotisms arouse a pure response of altruistic feeling, without the demoralizing threat of ideological controversy or the intrusion of other "adult" frustrations. A wonderful freedom from notions of either theological or political sin grows in those who work to understand and help children. Perceptions which were once the possession of only the intuitive few, who could seldom express what they knew, are now creating a language which makes possible a more general knowledge of children. There was a time, for example, when the following insight into children's art could hardly be understood in any "public" sense:

The little child works as a primitive, with no compulsion to follow the actual appearance and proportions of people and things. He has a fascinating way of putting the things most important to him in largest, while the less significant things are either deleted entirely or given little room and attention.

There is a story of an experiment in which some Russian professors had children paint the inside of a peasant's hut. The great stove, that contributed so

much in that bleak northland, the children made so large as to nearly fill the picture.

The professors studied the children's various interpretations, figuring everything until they came to one picture with a great oval in its center. This oval was filled with dynamic crisscross marks and was a third as big as the giant stove.

Finally one professor caught it: they were the matches . . . without which the stove would be cold and life unbearable. Very likely, too, matches at that time, in that country, were not so taken for granted as they are here and now. The child had only accorded them the attention he felt they deserved.

This capacity for unconscious distortion the teacher will find one of the charming features of children's art, one of the unexpected twists that only the child mind could conceive.

This is quoted from Natalie Robinson Cole's *The Arts in the Classroom* (John Day, 1940) . In another place Mrs. Cole warns:

The moment a teacher draws on the board or paints on paper, that moment is the child crippled and ruined. That moment he is ruined for confidence in his own way of doing. Hands off!

The elementary meaning here—at once obvious, yet still obscure for many—is the need of every parent and teacher to learn to put himself in the position of the child. How does the child think and feel? A fixed idea about what education is supposed to do for the young and an impatience for "growing up" can bring much unexplained sorrow to parents in later years. As Gladys Gardner Jenkins says in her Foreword to Ira Gordon's *Children's Views of Themselves*:

In these days—when the tensions under which children must live and learn are mounting, when competition is becoming increasingly intense, when children are often regimented into far too many "worth-while" activities so that there is little time for them to follow their own inclinations and interests—it becomes urgent for us to . . . stop to think about how the children feel. What are these pressures doing to Nora or Betty or Bill? What about the picture of the self which each one of these children is building? Is it one of self-confidence and self-respect, or have our expectations and pressures to achieve been wrong for them so that already they see themselves as defeated and failures? We can find out

from the children themselves if we keep the focus where it belongs—on the child and how it feels about himself.

A brooding awareness of the importance of the idea of the self—of the idea of the self held by each one of us—has been growing in the thought of the West for at least a generation. More and more it is recognized as the basic fulcrum of both spontaneous and deliberated behavior. The awakening to the self of the individual begins in childhood, and for most adults it is certainly still incomplete, yet those devoted to the fundamental springs of attitude and action, for educational purposes, are recognizing that all other studies of the learning process remain superficial unless they are related to this awakening. Essentially, it is a spontaneous and unique happening for each individual. Some rare passages in literature are devoted to what is often a feeling of sudden discovery—*I am me!* the child exclaims to himself. And as Herbert Spiegelberg remarked a few years ago in the *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* (Winter, 1964), this is a sort of self-awareness which should be distinguished from ideas of the self which result from the conditioning process:

The "I-am-me" experience, whether suddenly or gradually developed, has to do with a very different aspect of personal identity: the sense of "being it," of being the inescapable very me-myself, right now and here. As such the experience has no primary reference to past and future phases in its development nor to other comparable selves. This is, as it were, an experience of self-identity in depth rather than in temporal length and social breadth.

One might say that the spiritual dialogue with himself which becomes possible for the individual after such an experience is the primary source of all originality and genuine moral development. Or that profoundly inward feelings of the meaning of self-hood are the only ultimate reference for correcting conflicting or distorting influences from the external world. It is to these latter which Ira Gordon addresses himself in a passage concerning the characteristic encounters of the three-year-

old—when "he is beginning to see himself as separate and distinct from others":

His behavior—the so-called "negative stage"—can be viewed as attempts on his part at working on defining himself as apart from his parents. While this can be wearing on parents, it also can be seen as a necessary and vital step in the process of growing up. It is at this time that acceptance is so important because his behavior is harder to accept. Pressures from outside the family increase. Their expectations that he conform are ever present, and people in the street no longer see him as "cute." . . . He conceives of himself on the basis of the behavior of his parents toward him. They evaluate his behavior and he "takes over" and internalizes these evaluations making them a part of him. His original self-concepts are the result of his interactions with his parents and the meanings he assigns to these experiences.

But not entirely . . . or we should all be no more than off-prints of the previous generation's prejudices and opinions. There is in every child a potential for triumphing over his environment, for becoming self-actualizing, and this possibility is crucial in all educational thought concerning the idea of the self. The highest form of this idea, Erich Fromm suggests, "is simultaneously the fullest experience of individuality and its opposite; it is not so much a blending of the two as a polarity from whose tension religious experience springs."

The time must surely come when the discoveries about the golden age of childhood will eventually flood into and enrich ideas and attitudes of adult life, and then we shall see the beginnings of true understanding between widely differing cultures.

FRONTIERS "Only in America"?

PERSPECTIVE for self-criticism is so difficult to establish that when it comes, almost freely given, the impulse to set it down is practically irresistible. A few weeks ago (in *MANAS* for March 22, p. 2), we printed a long passage from Llewellyn's novel, *Man in a Mirror*, which described the wonderful world of the African Masai. The point of the quotation was that the very fullness of their environment, into which the wholeness of life of the tribe was woven, made it a closed system. Its effect, Mr. Llewellyn observes, "was to lock a growing mind in a wide prison of physical action and disciplined restriction that by habit became accepted as absolute liberty."

An American parallel to this paradox is suggested in an essay by Jean-Paul Sartre. In February, 1945, after a visit to the United States, Sartre wrote "Individualism and Conformism," which was later published in *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (Criterion, 1955). At the time of this visit America was still at war, and everywhere Sartre went he heard the blare of "morale"-indoctrinating persuasion. Yet the war propaganda was for him only a special case of the incessant effort of all Americans to educate themselves in being American. He wrote:

This educative tendency really springs from the heart of the community. Every American is educated by other Americans and educates others in turn. All through New York, in the schools and elsewhere, there are courses in Americanization.

Everything is taught: sewing, cooking, and even flirting. A school in New York gives a course for girls on how to get their boy-friends to propose to them. All of this is directed at forming pure Americans rather than men. But the American makes no distinction between American reason and ordinary reason. All the advice with which his path is marked is so perfectly motivated, so penetrating, that he feels lulled by an immense solicitude that never leaves him helpless or abandoned.

I have known modern mothers who never ordered their children to do anything without first

persuading them to obey. In this way they acquired a more complete and perhaps more formidable authority over their children than if they had threatened or beaten them. In the same way, the American, whose reason and freedom are called upon at every hour of the day, makes it a point of honor to do as he is asked. It is when he is acting like everyone else that he feels most reasonable and most American; it is in displaying his conformism that he feels freest.

Sartre is dry, perhaps cold, but there is no rancor in what he says. His experience of America seems like a contact between different epochs of history, or the encounter of invincible innocence by one who has been through an unrelenting exposure to a very different order of "reality." Only this innocence could support the feeling that to be an American is to embody the full achievements of advancing civilization:

Thus, when the American puts a nickel into the slot in the tram or in the underground, he feels like everyone else. Not like an anonymous unit, but like a man who has divested himself of his individuality and raised himself to the impersonality of the Universal.

It was this complete freedom in conformism that struck me at the very beginning. There is no freer city than New York. You can do as you please there. It is public opinion that plays the role of the policeman. The few Americans I met seemed to me at first to conform through freedom, to be depersonalized through rationalism. They seemed to identify Universal Reason with their own particular nation, within the framework of the same creed.

It should be noted that a more particularized apprehension of this conformism has been finding expression by Americans since the war. Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man* (1950) is a desperate analysis of the prison of technological rationalization. And, more recently, the explosive moral fervor of the New Left is evidence of the successful externalization of assumptions that were behind a rapidly vanishing euphoria. The long and painful process of a new self-discovery for Americans has just begun.

The French, it might be remarked, have also had problems and opportunities along these lines. For the French workman who had been educated

by the labor movement, the prospect of World War I made a hard choice. The moral poles of this decision were represented on the one hand by the radical ideal of the solidarity of workers throughout the world, regardless of national boundaries, and on the other by the heightened consciousness of every Frenchman that *France* had made the great, pioneering, European revolution and was the creator and preserver of the ideals of liberty and equality. Could they risk destruction of the very chalice of modern political achievement because of a doubtful fraternity with the German workers—who, after all, had not been tested in revolutionary fires?

Sartre's understanding of "individualism," as "the individual's struggle against society and, more particularly, against the State," takes time and bitter experience to shape into positive doctrine. And there remains the crucial question of what to put in place of the State. How do men generate a sense of reality for a new social ideal? We are all laggard in this.

Meanwhile, there is substance for long thoughts in the following by Sartre:

The peculiarity of the American . . . is the fact that he regards his thought as universal. One can discern in this a Puritan influence. . . . Thus, most of the people I spoke with seemed to have a naive and passionate faith in the virtues of Reason. An American said to me one evening, "After all, if international politics were in the hands of well-balanced, reasonable men, wouldn't war be abolished forever?" Some French people said that this did not necessarily follow, and he got angry. "All right," he said, "go and build cemeteries!" I, for my part, said nothing; discussion between us was impossible. I believe in the existence of evil and he does not.